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PROPOSAL END EXAM 2012

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During the last two weeks, I've decided to change the content of my end exam project. I've been looking for a project that could give me more space to research, and that would be closer to my professional practice as a set designer. This proposal is short and fragmented because of this recent change of plans.

Description of project:

An investigation on how moving images interact with life performance will be illustrated by the example of two design concepts for two different theatre plays.

Audience:

The outcomes of this investigation could be presented to an audience either through a video projection of the visual material used in the performances, a documentation of the designing process and of the theatre performances, or in the form of a lecture given by myself.

Subject matter:

The starting point for my research will be exploring the use of scale in life performance. By seating an audience in one room with actors on a stage, I can make the audience experience the tension between the scale of the human body and the scale of the space around them. Projections of still or moving images on stage can accentuate the difference in size. In the first of the two set designs I want to create an amorphous space without any visible walls. Actors should be seen only as vague figures in an endless and wide landscape of fog and air. With the help of projections, scrims, and artificial fog, I shall enforce the impression of a scene set outside instead of inside a theatre. The second design will deal with the human body, especially with the skin. Here I shall begin by taking close up photographs of skin, showing possible irritations and injuries of the skin. I shall experiment with projecting these oversized images on stage and let them interact with life performers.

Content:

The first design I will develop is for the Dutch version of Henrik Ibsen's play *Little Eyolf* (1894). The play takes place in a country house by a Norwegian fjord, and describes the struggle of a couple after losing their nine year old son. The second design will be for *Fegefeuer in Ingolstadt (Purgatory in Ingolstadt)* (1924) by the German writer Marie Luise Fleisser. In the play, a group of teenagers in a provincial town agitate their fellow citizens against a pregnant girl and an outsider.

The set designs will both be shown in collaboration with the director Susanne Kennedy, at Het Nationale Toneel in The Hague, and at Kammerspiele in Munich, Germany. As the theatre productions will be shown in a different context to the end exam show of the Piet Zwart Institute, I shall make the designs part of a wider research on the use of moving images on stage.

Relationship to relevant previous practice:

Already in my work as a set designer, I have explored the possibilities of using different lens-based media. To take only a few examples: my final project at the Rietveld Academy in part involved the video projection of a live actor; I created a design for Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* based on photographs that I had taken; in Berlin, for the opening of a new library, I made a film for a large-scale theatre piece on the theme of the book.

To take one example in detail, the last theatre project I worked on as a designer was the Austrian writer, Elfriede Jelinek's play, *Over Dieren*. In this project I incorporated video as central to the set design. Jelinek works with fragmentation and repetition; she leaves it open to interpretation as to who speaks the words of the text. This interest in fragmentation and the alienation of the voice gave us the idea not to only work with actors on the stage, but also to have them both play against and interact with the presence of different media. During the preparation period for the production, I filmed volunteers who performed elements of the text for the camera. The set design consisted of 40 televisions, on which the faces of these anonymous men could be seen. The camera zoomed onto the faces in such a way that it seemed as if the televisions themselves possessed faces. During

the rehearsal period we experimented with the role that the televisions played in the performance. Some effects emerged by accident: for example we discovered that an audio signal disturbed the video signal, thereby making sound visible on television.

As a designer, here, and elsewhere in my work, I became fascinated by the ways in which recorded visual material interacts with live performance. In *Over Dieren*, the screens created pictures in space, using two-dimensional images to create a 3D effect; the televisions were also sources of light and colour, framing the atmosphere of the performance.